

Lesson Plan: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' Meeting

In this lesson, students will make decisions for Fairfax County based on the supervisory districts they represent. It involves independent research and a role-playing activity.

Connection to POS: Standard 8.1

- ◆ *Students will explain the responsibilities of a citizen in the family, school, community, state, nation, and the world. (8.1.2.a.)*
- ◆ *Students will realize the expectation that responsible citizens become informed about and involved with contemporary and continuing issues in civic life (8.1.3.a.)*
- ◆ *Students will describe how individuals participate in the political process by....communicating with government officials, supporting and working with political parties and interest groups....and attending meetings of governing bodies (8.1.3.c.)*

SOL Standards: 7.2.b, 7.3.a, 7.4.e, 7.9.a



Objectives

At the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- ◆ describe the duties of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.
- ◆ explain how the Board of Supervisors influences the public agenda in the County.



Materials

- ◆ copies of Student Handout – Board of Supervisors Meeting Scenarios
or
- ◆ Copies of *Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Weekly Agenda*, available online at www.co.fairfax.va.us/gov/bos. For a free subscription, call (703) 324-3185.



Time Needed

- ◆ independent research time and a 90-minute class period.
(The length of time for the activity can vary widely depending on the number of scenarios you choose to use and how responsibilities are divided among class members.)



Procedures

1. Divide class members into roles for this simulation. Depending on class size, a good arrangement might be to have a pair of students represent each County supervisor. (You will need to “save” some students to represent interest groups and individual citizens in the second part of the activity.)
2. Distribute copies of Student Handout – Board of Supervisors Meeting Scenarios to each pair of students. (At this point, you could use actual copies of the *Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Weekly Agenda* instead of the Student Handout. This will make your lesson more “real,” but you risk having students working with material that they find hard to understand or somewhat boring.) Allow students time to read the list of items. Discuss how many of them they think would affect their life. Have them record their responses in their journal/notebook and comment on the impact on them if these laws were passed.
3. Students should research the County supervisor they have been assigned and the district he or she represents outside of class time (or in the computer lab as a class.) They can begin by referring back to the “Who’s Who?” activity in the lesson on the organization of Fairfax County government. They should be trying to discover how their supervisor might react to the scenarios on the handout. Students should be urged to consider the demographics of the district as well as their supervisor’s most recent election platform when determining how their respective supervisors would vote.
4. On the designated day for the simulation, arrange the classroom to represent the County Board Room. The Board Chair opens the meeting and presents the scenarios for debate and discussion, one at a time. A brief script may be helpful in starting the meeting so that the simulation will more closely approximate an actual meeting.
5. For each chosen scenario, allow the supervisors to speak on behalf of his or her district for approximately three minutes, and then have the Chair call for a vote. Allow for rebuttal or follow-up at your discretion, depending on time and student preparation.
6. After sufficient debate on each proposed ordinance, the Chair should call for a vote.
7. Discuss with students how much of the decision-making gets done at meetings and how much research, negotiation, and deal-making probably takes place behind the scenes.



Assessment

- ◆ Anecdotal records should be maintained during the simulation noting participation, degree of preparation, and effectiveness of oral presentation skills.
- ◆ Students could actually write to their Supervisor or follow local coverage of board votes to compare the position they took with the actual position taken. They could then complete a self-assessment and evaluation of the outcome in their journals or notebooks.



Extensions

- ◆ See Lesson Plan-*Influencing the Agenda: The Impact of Interest Groups on Policy Making*.
- ◆ Invite a member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to visit your school to speak to the students before or after the simulation.
- ◆ Have students attend an actual County Board Meeting and report to the class on what they saw and heard.
- ◆ Watch Channel 16 for recent board meetings. Clips of previously taped meetings may also help students understand both how the meetings are conducted as well as how debate and discussion can influence the outcome of Board votes.



Differentiations

- ◆ You may wish to provide a list of guiding questions to help students conduct their research as well as a voting history for each supervisor. This gives students a starting point and a database” against which they may wish to compare their impressions of how the supervisor might vote to their actual vote on a similar issue.
- ◆ Allow students who may be nervous about public speaking to consult notes and/or prepare their remarks beforehand. Give them an opportunity to practice in front of you or a small group before having to speak in front of the entire class.



Interdisciplinary Connections

- ◆ Work with the English teacher or drama/speech teacher on public speaking and persuasion skills.